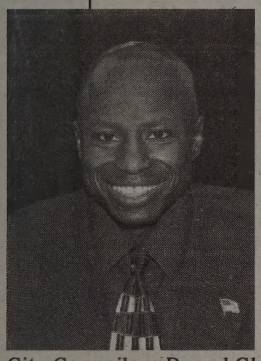
Diversity, please

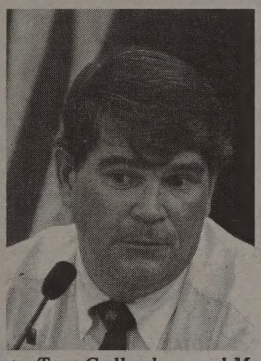
City cracks open the door on multiculturalism by endorsing festival

By Naomi Zeveloff

Not all the City Council members copped to Colorado Springs' image as an exclusive and unwelcoming place. But every one of them took a small step Tuesday to change that perception by agreeing to co-sponsor a downtown cultural festival in August.

The event, created by the Diversity Forum, will be the first fair to be held annually to unite various ethnic and cultural groups from around the city. Included in the lineup — and the subject of several council members' alarm — is the Gay and Lesbian Fund for Colorado, a large local grantmaker.





City Councilors Darryl Glenn, Tom Gallagher and Margaret Radford intially criticized the multicultural festival for its inclusion of gays and lesbians, but all three backed the fair at Tuesday's meeting.

Nearly three weeks ago, when Diversity Forum representatives first petitioned the city for support, three council members spoke out against the event. Darryl Glenn, Margaret Radford and Tom Gallagher expressed qualms regarding gay and lesbian involvement, saying their presence would inherently politicize the fair.

"I'll be blunt," said Glenn at the initial meeting. "What I see happening is an expansion of the definition of marriage. And a display of an event like that, that's a political issue."

Council's unanimous vote Tuesday to support the festival represents a compromise on the part of some members. But it doesn't erase years of anti-gay rhetoric and votes from current and past councilors. Nor does it clarify why some council members doubted the intentions of the Diversity Forum, of which the city was an inaugural member.

Checkered past

Founded two years ago to combat the city's intolerant image, the Diversity Forum counts among its members several large local players, including Colorado College, the Economic Development Corporation and the Chamber of Commerce.

When Glenn's own diversity initiative flopped last year after he failed to invite gays, disabled people and women, the council looked to the Diversity Forum as a surrogate.

"I know that all my colleagues and I have been invited to every meeting," says Jerry Heimlicher, the singular council member to argue against Radford and Glenn's comments.

"I am the only one who has attended, to my knowledge," he says. "For Mr. Glenn to say he was unaware of this group is rather ludicrous. We all agreed this was the way to go."

The Diversity Forum based its definition of "diversity" on the city's description. Several city staffers, including City Manager Lorne Kramer and spokeswomen Sue Skiffington-Blumberg and Becky Farrar, have been active in the organization.

"I was surprised at the reaction there seemed to be, especially since council had been briefed on the forum," says Kramer.

The Gay and Lesbian Fund was one of the first of several organizations to sign on to the Diversity Forum, and the council has known of its association for at least seven months (since an earlier Forum presentation). The Gay and Lesbian Fund, which aims to promote equality in the region, donates to area nonprofits including the American Red Cross and Big Brothers Big Sisters; it has invested more than $5 million in the community.

When the group celebrated its 10th anniversary last winter, director and former mayor Mary Lou Makepeace petitioned council for a resolution of appreciation. But the request was denied.

"I don't think it makes the council look particularly leaderful," says Makepeace of recent council members' comments. "I don't think it makes Colorado Springs look particularly welcoming to people, and I don't think that it reflects the perspective of the majority of Colorado Springs."

A standing ovation

In addition to council's recent bumbling on the Diversity Forum, city leaders in recent years have excluded gays and lesbians. In 2003, council abolished a same-sex partner benefit plan for city employees. The next year, Rivera withheld a proclamation to support PrideFest, an annual Pikes Peak Gay & Lesbian Community Center event. He hasn't endorsed it since.

At Tuesday's council meeting, community leaders posited the Diversity Forum vote as an opportunity for the city to change course.

"The discussion today is one of those defining moments for our city," said Chamber of Commerce CEO Will Temby, speaking on the economic growth that accompanies diversity.

Local business owner Jay Patel commented on the "Welcome to Colorado Springs" signs that flank the city boundaries, saying, "If you put those signs up, City Council, I ask you to prove nationally and internationally that you mean it."

He asked sponsorship supporters in the audience to rise, and nearly everyone in the council chambers stood up. Council's vote was met with a standing ovation.

The multicultural festival will cost the city around $10,300 in police fees and rental costs for Acacia Park, the City Auditorium and the Show Mobile (a stage on wheels).

As the Diversity Forum prepares for the Aug. 18 event, city leaders may be coming to grips with Colorado Springs' sometimes-rancid reputation. They may even understand their own role in creating it.

"During the [recent city election] campaign, people would ask me, 'Is this perception true?'" Vice Mayor Larry Small said Tuesday. "It doesn't matter. If it's a perception, it is something we have to deal with."

— naomi@csindy.com

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1. Speaker Series continues: Colorado College poet **Jane Hilberry** will read from and sign her Colorado Book Award winning collection *Body Painting* and Wicker Prize winner **Kate Northrop** (top) will read from and sign her just published collection *Things Are Disappearing Here* on Thursday, May 10 at 6 pm.
2. **Jazz Sundays at Ricos** continue at 5 pm, starring saxophonist and recording artist Tony Exum, Jr. and friends.
3. Just released **new books** (at discount prices) such as those featured on NPR.
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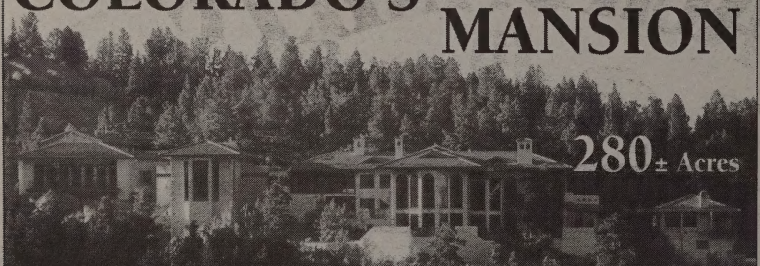

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Betwee

By Ralph Routon

Let's improve liqu

Imagine going to a bar sometime in tomorrow. Imagine sitting the slow pace, without having to guzzl

Imagine walking out of the bar a to join the group for a pre-dawn br slam 'em down before a 1:30 last c

No, that wouldn't have to be in a in Fort Walton Beach, Fla., where journey that eventually led back to

When you live in other places, F but appreciate the small things that

That list has to start with one sp

If you've only lived in Colorado, ed, there are other states with liquo

Go to Florida, though, and you a Beach (in the Panhandle, home to even looser bar hours than most, c ally would close at 5:30 a.m. and r out late and closing bars in the new the after-midnight crowd there rare

There's more. In Florida and most beer (real beer, all the time, not the 3 In both states, you had to wait until your favorite lager or cabernet just d with convenience stores, though thei

Florida's liquor stores also can o stock up early, or going out late Sa

It makes you wond why Colorado never has come out of the Dark Ages.

kets selling wine and full-strength b and Texas, both prospered. You'd fi but supermarkets had plenty to offe California, France and Europe, Aus

Then you come back to Colorad

Come on, 3.2 beer? Wasn't that a 21 could drink legally?

The time has come for Colorado We would also suggest permitting Colorado probably isn't ready for t elsewhere, as easy as 1-2-3.

First, beer *and* wine at grocery s tists have a lot more clout, why not

Second, no more 3.2 beer. It sho — though liquor stores would have distributors wouldn't have to worry

Third, let the liquor stores open aren't working anyway, and they sh up that bottle of Jack Daniel's or sc

Some might say the state Legisla the lawmakers can spend time deb sions, they can make our lives mor full-strength Sam Adams or a bott

It's one time when we can learn